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What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?

How to add value to official statistics?

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Summary

The phenomenon of Big Data, the demand for open data and technological advances have generated new competition for official statistics and are bound to change the role of official statistics in society. Given these developments, the paper considers how to add value to official statistics and create positive user experience. It will be important to maintain the loyalty of users of official statistics and develop the value of official statistics for them.

The paper is presented for discussion to the Conference of European Statisticians seminar on "What is the value of official statistics and how do we communicate that value?".

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I. Introduction

1. During the first days of the Internet, businesses and institutions used this channel as an extension of their "business card". Institutional and corporative websites were little more than the image of the company, a declaration of principles and a contact list.

2. Later, the Internet began to be filled with content. The first to "fill" the web were those who already had a product prior to the digital age: the media, libraries, encyclopaedias, institutions. In this context, the Internet was one-directional, from providers to users, and the second group became aware of websites because they were already aware of the physical products (newspapers, institutions…). From this point, knowledge flowed in abundance as a result of the links that these Internet pioneers placed on their sites.

3. This radically changed with two extremely noteworthy events: The birth of Google and the web 2.0. It is not satisfactory to simply reach the largest possible audience via redistributors, but rather we must strive to ensure communicating directly with this audience.

4. To communicate implies basically to know how to discuss and coexist and it also allows us to understand "our place in the world"[1] and given multiple players involved in the communicative act, this process is less simple than it seems, especially when social complex actors such as diverse audiences, institutions, governments, etc. appear in the scene.

5. Consumers and users are constantly changing their selection parameters and shopping habits, institutions and enterprises have to innovate permanently in their marketing strategies.

6. The number of products in communication channels leads the way to saturation of information that causes confusion and is later translated to noise in the process of communication. It is important to understand this premise: Communication is all around, it is not possible not to communicate, and every action is communication. When an organization chooses not to communicate, what it is actually doing is negative communication, which means not really existing.[2]

7. It is safe to say that marketing and sales executives are aware that there are governmental agencies in countries who are responsible for conducting a census. Some of the more sophisticated executives might even know that these agencies also collect and disseminate data beyond basic census data, including economy, health, education, labour, agriculture information, among others. If the private sector is large enough, it might even have on staff a researcher who has more comprehensive knowledge of what governmental agencies provide.

8. National statistical offices (NSOs) have not often established powerful networking relationships with users, therefore, they need to formulate strategies to retain users by deepening the connections with them towards full interaction and feedback that allow fulfilling the mandate of official statistics. Statistical offices should better communicate that the information they provide is for users' benefit.

9. The focus is on connecting customers to the information content they need, taking into account when and how they need it. "Content" refers to everything from product

[1] *Comunicación Estratégica*, Daniel Scheinsohn, Granica, 1ª edición Buenos Aires, 2009, page. 15
[2] Ibid page 23

information to the task of delivering the content in the moment the customer needs it. Providing relevant and timely information (more real time information) requires anticipating the customer's need, fully understanding the request, delivering information when the customer needs it, and adapting swiftly when new information is asked for.

II. How to add value to the data?

10. Adding value is the way to customize a product to meet customer needs and expectations.

11. The value of data depends on the specific usefulness they provide the user with. This value is determined in a subjective and individual fashion by the user.

12. Increasing the value of data first requires generating a positive user experience.

III. How to generate a positive user experience?

13. For NSOs and users, a positive user experience would be a win-win situation. Generating a positive experience calls for continuous interaction with users of statistics to enable identifying their needs, expectations, preferences, habits and appropriate communication channels.

14. The interaction with users allows the NSOs to adjust the data supply to users' lifestyle and needs.

15. A Customer Relation Management (CRM) system could be useful in developing concrete relationships with users. It helps to recognize the value of long-lasting relationships with strategic users and user segments. Efficiently dealing with all the users and providing them what they actually need increases permanently user satisfaction.

16. A CRM system allows analysing behaviour of users of statistics. This helps to foresee user's needs effectively, focusing and concentrating on each and every user also individually – allowing personalization of service.

17. A CRM integrates the information caught through different communication channels, such as the website, social media, call centres, chat, e-mail etc., and thus support NSO in providing users with the statistics and services based on their needs. This in turn can help to generate a positive experience.

18. The phenomenon of "Big Data", the demand for "Open Data" and technological advances have generated new actors in the information industry that compete in practice with NSOs who are bound to rethink their role in the production and dissemination of statistical data.

19. Given this, the question is: How to add value to official statistics, and meet new challenges? It seems that data users, in different sectors, today and in the future will maintain their loyalty to official statistics if they discover the value it has for them. This is not easy to achieve, but there are some criteria that can help approach this goal:

A. Credibility

1. Best practices

Adoption of international best practices and techniques in the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistical data.

2. Coherence in data

The use of standard concepts, classifications and target populations promotes coherence and credibility of statistical information, as does the use of common methodology across surveys. Adherence to these core dissemination principles will enhance the credibility of NSOs and build public trust in the reliability of official statistics.

3. Independence and objectivity

Information has to be presented in an objective and impartial manner, and NSOs need to be independent of any political control or influence.

B. Accessibility

1. Access for everyone

Data should be available to all users through the different communication channels.

2. Appropriate language

Language used in by NSOs should be understandable to users.

3. Timely information

Data and statistics released should be timely to be relevant.

4. Open formats

Statistics should be presented in the appropriate formats and in the right mix of channels to reinforce de message.

5. Browser compatibility

NSOs' websites must be usable across all major systems, whether it is popular browsers, mobile devices, or any other web browsing devices. It is very important to ensure that NSOs' web services can be used in any common browser.

C. Desirability

1. Attractiveness

For creating an attractive product it is necessary to focus on the color, size, lighting, and simplicity.

2. Visualization

Innovations and technological advances provide new ways to visualize data which can add value to the statistical products. Geo-referencing, dynamic graphs and apps are examples of visualizations tools.

3. Storytelling

Data and statistics should be presented so that they tell a story in an easily understood, interesting and entertaining way.

D. Usability

1. Web architecture

Website architecture should be designed to prioritize and organize information so that it facilitates the use of statistics.

2. Navigation

The navigation of the website should be as easy and fast as possible to make users stay on the website and return.

3. Intuitiveness

It is important to keep the website simple so the users do not need any kind of assistance during navigation and feel comfortable using the web services of NSOs.

4. Categorization

Categorization must have a user focus instead of a producer focus that allows user to find statistics quickly and easily.

E. Usefulness

1. Functionality

NSOs need to consider how to satisfy user´s expectations with regard to functionality of statistical products as well, especially on the website.

2. Differentiation

User segmentation according to strategic user groups may be helpful in designing statistical products and services.

3. User satisfaction

Developing products based on users' needs in order to satisfy their expectations.

4. Personalization of data

Using different technological tools to allow users to acquire the information they need according to their individual expectations and needs.

An example of such personalization could be Starbucks who has managed to differentiate its service for each customer by providing a variety of possible choices, making ordering an emotional experience by writing down thc name of each consumer in cups, and afterwards recognizing frequent customers, engaging in a conversation with them and remembering their names and recognizing their individual tastes and preferences.

F. Easy to find

1. Search engine

Users should find the statistics they are looking on the website in a fast and simple way e.g. using search engines.

2. Easy naming

The names of products should be attractive and give an idea of what the product contains and what they are for, so as to facilitate the search for users.

3. Marketing campaigns

Creating brand positioning strategies and techniques focused on the different user segments which enable presenting NSOs' products and services as well as the communication channels used.